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## THE Modern Language Association of America.

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The Second Annual Convention of The Modern Language Association of America, was held at Columbia College, New York, on December 29th and 30th, 1884. The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p. m., on the 29th, by the President, Franklin Carter, President of Williams College, Mass.

The Secretary, Prof. A. M. Elliott, of the Johns Hopkins University, read a brief report of the proceedings of the first Convention, also held at Columbia College, on December 27th and 28th, 1883.

This report, after having been supplemented by a few details, was accepted. The Secretary then proceeded to review the work of the last session, and to give some account of the origin of the Modern Language Association. The following is an abstract of his remarks :

Several months before Mr. Charles Francis Adams' address was delivered, (June, 1883), a few Professors of Modern Languages in different Institutions of the Eastern States had consulted with reference to the advisability of calling a meeting of their colleagues during the Christmas holidays of 1883. It was finally concluded in the month of May to do so, and the sympathizers with the project went to work to interest their friends and acquaintances in it. Meanwhile the Harvard Address came off, and so thoroughly stirred up public interest for this subject, that, in the autumn when the Academic year opened, the plan of a Conference was considered quite feasible. On November 16th, 1883, a preliminary circular was issued from Baltimore, to ascertain whether the number of those who desired to meet for the purpose of discussion of subjects pertaining to modern language study, would be sufficient to justify a general call. The result of this

inquiry was encouraging, and then about half a dozen professors, representing the Departments of English, German, and Romance Languages, in different Institutions, joined together on December 15th, in a general invitation to a Conference to be held at Columbia College, (New York city), on the 27th and 28th of December.

On the opening of the Convention at 3 p. m., on the former of these dates, forty teachers were present from the following Institutions: Amherst, one representative; Ann Arbor, two; Boston University, one; Brown, two; Columbia, five; Hamilton, one; Harvard, two; Johns Hopkins, five; Lafayette College, one; Lehigh, one; University of Pennsylvania, two; Princeton, one; University of St. Louis, one; Swarthmore, one; University of Syracuse, one; Tufts College, one; Vanderbilt, one; University of Virginia, one; Williams, two; Yale, two. Also from Institutions in New York City, excepting Columbia College, there were five representatives; and from New Jersey, one. On behalf of Columbia College, President Barnard welcomed the members of the Conference, expressing his full sympathy with the objects of the meeting and contrasting in graphic outlines the difference between the opportunities for modern language study to-day and when he attended college. President Carter, of Williams, was then chosen Chairman, and Dr. O'Connor, of Columbia, Secretary of the Convention. Correspondence was presented from Profs. Bôcher, Harvard; Blackwell, University of Missouri; Garner, University of Indiana; Grubé, University of Nebraska; Gummere, New Bedford; Harrison, Washington and Lee University; Hart, University of Cincinnati; Joynes, South Carolina College; Mixer, University of Rochester; Nash, Harvard; Primer and Shepherd, College of Charleston; Tallichet, University of Texas; Schele de Vere, University of Virginia. From this correspondence, many interesting and instructive selections were made that threw light on the condition of modern language study in the different districts represented by the writers.

After reading a part of this correspondence the questions proposed for discussion by the Convention were presented in the following shape:—

I. The present condition of English, German, and French in our Colleges:—

(a) Their needs as to time and place.

(b) Requirements for entering College.

II. The disciplinary value of the Modern as compared with the Ancient Languages.

III. The Methods of teaching the Modern Languages, (Inductive, Deductive, Eclectic).

IV. The best expedients for raising the standard of these studies, and the chief material obstacles in their way.

V. The general Educational results to be aimed at by College training in the Modern Languages.

As the Sessions of the Conference were limited to four only, (two on the 27th, and two on the 28th), it was suggested to select those points from the proposed questions that bear more especially upon our immediate needs, and numbers I, III, and IV, were accordingly settled upon as the most appropriate subjects to claim the attention of the meeting.

The time of the first two sessions was then devoted to the Needs of the Modern Languages, and to the Requirements in them for entering College. Much valuable information was brought out, with reference to the former of these points, for the different sections of our country. The North, West, and South, were shown to vary so materially in the opportunities offered for acquiring foreign languages; the systems of education were so diverse, and especially the age at which boys take up a foreign tongue is so varying, that it would seem at present impracticable to recommend any uniform rule for entrance to College. A strong feeling, however, prevails that it will not be long before some requirement in the Modern Languages, just as for the Classics, will generally be made by all Institutions of good standing, and, while there was doubt as to the possibility of demanding at present such preparatory knowledge, the members were well-nigh a unit on another point of greater importance, namely, that a reading knowledge of French and German should form one of the requisites for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. It was strenuously urged that, as this distinction claims to represent "liberal" scholarship, it should naturally include a sufficient knowledge of these tongues to be able to become acquainted with the current lines of modern thought given in them, and without which no man of our age could esteem himself liberally educated. The lively discussion that was entered into upon this subject, turned almost exclusively upon the means by which this end could be reached, the element of time being the chief difficulty to contend with. In many, otherwise good Institutions, no requirements in these languages exists for admission, and after the student has entered, only one term, each, is devoted to them during his College course, and even then he is so pressed with other work that only in a few cases does he get anything like a decent introduction to them, much less a familiarity that would enable him to feel somewhat at home in the strange idioms.

In such circumstances, the impracticability of holding up to teachers the united sentiment of the Convention, that they should press for the immediate introduction of the Modern Languages as a necessary factor for the Bachelor's degree, was duly recognized, and they were, therefore, earnestly recommended to insist, at present, for more time being given to these branches as the first needful step towards a reform in this direction.

In the animated discussion that followed on Methods, the detailed experience of teachers from different parts of the United States

brought to light the striking richness of the field in which we have to work, the almost endless variety of interests that have to be looked after by any given branch of our Educational System, and the interesting adaptation of means and modifications of general plans to suit the needs of local educational centres. We have certainly learned, from a comparison of views on this subject, that Modern Language study with us is just now entering upon a transition period which is bound to make a decided step forward in its history. We are a peculiar people and require peculiar modes of education. Whatever is done must be done with the wants of our practical life kept constantly before us, and hence the struggle fairly entered upon here, between the purely practical and purely theoretical systems of teaching these languages.

The old traditions have been severely shaken by the new-comer, the so-called Natural Method, especially for the teaching of children, and the field is now divided into two hostile parties. The conservative influence, however, of the Colleges has tended, from the beginning, to bridge over the chasm between them, and to show the world that there is an ideal to be sought in all, even the rigidly practical training of life. It is, therefore, most gratifying to see that the predominant opinion of the New York meeting was in favor of an Eclectic system of instruction for the modern idioms; but for the advanced instruction, the members recognized the paramount importance of sound historical training as contrasted with the parrot-like procedures of the strictly exclusive Pestalozzian system. They were not only of well-nigh unanimous sentiment that colleges should look to a thorough grounding of the pupil in the principles of his science, but they went one step further and adopted the practical resolution, without a dissenting voice, that intellectual discipline should be the chief aim of College work. This implies not merely a theoretical study of the constituent grammatical elements of a language but also their history; in other words, it gives an historical, scientific basis to the training recommended for colleges, as may be seen in the words of the resolution itself: "That, in the opinion of the Association, the chief aims to be sought in the study of Modern Languages in our Colleges, are literary culture, philological scholarship and linguistic discipline, but that a course in oral practice is desirable as an auxiliary." With this decided expression of views before us, we can easily predict here the line of development for the different departments of Modern Language study in the immediate future. A demand has already begun to spring up all over the country for scientifically trained teachers, and that demand will increase in proportion as the benefits derived from scientific training become known, and, yet, alongside of this ideal culture, we shall have to constantly bear in mind the preeminently practical life of the American youth. The great problem for the teacher of to-day, is to harmonize these two ideas; where the one shall begin and the other

end; their mutual relations in time and place; their respective and proportionate importance according to the needs of local education. That the Convention was able to arrive at a positive statement of opinion on this very important question, I regard as one of the most encouraging signs of the times.

The last subject brought before the Convention was, "The Best Expedients for raising the Standard of Modern Language studies, and the Chief Obstacles in their Way." Here the Journal was the first idea to be suggested, and there was a division of opinion as to the best character to be given to such a publication. On the one hand, it was held that an organ of communication confined to the interests of the Modern Languages (English, German, and Romance Languages), with a coloboration of editors representing, one each, these three departments, would be the best means of keeping before the public sound views on philological matters, and of doing good work in the field. According to this idea, there should be three divisions of each department, one for original articles, one for reviews of books, and a third for the discussion of pedagogical questions within the linguistic domain represented by the Journal. On the other hand, it was held that such an undertaking would be more likely to have financial success if the publication were made thoroughly popular, and should be open to the treatment of all language subjects. In this way, illustration and other aids to popular interest might be used, so that the circle of its readers would naturally be much wider than if it were confined strictly to the needs of a particular field. The two ideas, however, as was shown, do not necessarily clash, since the one would be especially that adapted for a teachers' organ, while the other would be adapted to the tastes of the general public. Whatever should be done to bring us nearer together and give us a sense of centralized power, this Journal idea was thought to be of the greatest importance, as through it every man could have a chance to make his views known, and to have them criticized by the body at large.

The members generally seemed thus to regard the Journal as one of our most pressing needs, and while it was not thought desirable to take any direct action with reference to it on the part of the Convention, as a body, it was urged that some one should set out upon the enterprise, and the support and encouragement of the members were assured.

Other means of bettering the condition of these studies were suggested, some of which agreed with those proposed in the above correspondence. First of all, we must have better teachers. None but trained teachers should be appointed to positions for giving instruction in Modern Languages. Here, as in other departments of learning, the demands of the Institutions should be such that no one, except a man of scientific training, could enter the profession, and, in this way, the incompetent would naturally be shut out, and the

department would rise in the esteem and consideration of the public. More rigid examinations, but, above all, claims for more time, should be urged upon College authorities, and the whole department thereby raised to a respected place in the College Curriculum, with the requirement always, that it should perform its fair share of duty in the mental discipline of our youth.

During the discussion on this point, a Committee from the Society of Naturalists for the Eastern United States, then in session at Columbia College, came in, and presented the following resolution by that body: "That, the Society of Naturalists of the Eastern United States, recognizing the great importance of a thorough knowledge of Modern Languages, especially of German and French, to students of Natural History, regard it as a hopeful sign that a Conference of Professors in this department is now assembled at Columbia College, and hereby express its hearty sympathy with this work."

After these gentlemen had withdrawn, the Conference called for the report of the Committee, appointed at its first meeting to suggest a plan of organization, which was submitted as follows:

I. We, the undersigned, form ourselves into a Society that shall be called "THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA."

II. (a) Any Modern Language teacher of any College that gives the degree of B. A., shall be considered a member of this Association.

(b) Other teachers may be members on invitation of the Executive Committee.

III. (a) The officers shall consist of a President, Secretary, and eight members of the Association, who shall constitute an Executive Committee.

(b) The President shall be Chairman of said Committee.

(c) The Secretary shall be also corresponding secretary of the Committee.

IV. A meeting of the Association shall be held during the Christmas holidays of 1884, on such date and at such place as the Committee shall decide.

The election of officers for the ensuing year then came up, and the following gentlemen were named for this purpose:—

Pres. F. Carter, of Williams College, President of the Association.

A. M. Elliott, Johns Hopkins University, Secretary.

H. C. G. Brandt, Hamilton College.

J. M. Hart, University of Cincinnati.

E. S. Joynes, South Carolina College.

F. Lutz, Harvard College.

F. A. March, Lafayette College.

C. Sprague Smith, Columbia College.

E. L. Walter, University of Michigan.

A. Williams, Brown University.

The Conference then adjourned.

In looking back over the main lines of discussion carried out as stated above, and noting the various suggestions brought before this Convention, we must be impressed, I think, with one striking feature of them, that is, their marked conservatism. There was little disposition manifest to overthrow the existing state of things so far as the relation of Modern to Classical languages is concerned, in point of importance, but a serious, determined unity of sentiment to move with all possible energy towards the establishment, and legitimate maintenance of the claims of the Modern studies for the same rights and privileges as are now enjoyed by the Classics.

Considering the present low standing of the subject in the minds of most American educators, and the consequent neglect of it in our systems of education; considering the inferior position that many of our Modern Language professors hold compared with their colleagues in other subjects; remembering that there never had been before any attempt to unite the professors of Modern Languages, or in any way stir up a feeling of common interest with them; noting the differences of educational requirements in different sections of our country, and bearing in mind that the representatives of this Conference came together without knowing, in many cases, anything of the nature of the subjects to be presented for discussion, and, hence, wholly unprepared on them;—taking into account these things, I say, the meeting in New York must be considered a success, and, perhaps, the most remarkable one of its kind ever held in the United States.

Besides the natural results of acquaintance with one another, and the development of an *esprit de corps* among its members, the Convention contributed to the following practical ends:

1. The centralization of Modern Language forces, represented by an organized body.
2. Acquaintance with the characteristic needs of the different sections of our country.
3. Agreement with reference to the general character of instruction to be aimed at in the Colleges.
4. A recognition of the most feasible means to be used for raising the standard of Modern Language study.
5. The special, sectional difficulties to be contended with, in the development of any general system of improvement.